

GEORGE COBURN: 8-18-2003

Boot camp in San Diego. 1938. Boarded Okie in Long Beach. Took oil tanker from San Diego to Long Beach.

Recalled King Bodie. Recently from the Orient. Maybe had a bit of China Syndrome. Didn't know the origin of King Bodie, whether it was before or after. At change in command ceremony Bodie said in effect that the ship was a piece of shit, and that they were going to clean it up.

Recalled near collision with Enterprise. Standby for collision forward, standby for collision amidships, standby for collision aft. Bend flagstaff on the stern.

Had left ship to go to Fire Control school. Returned to Okie sometime in November. Collision with Enterprise occurred after that. Change in command ceremony occurred after he had returned. At Fire Control school for six months.

Did not recall anything in particular happening during the week prior to the attack.

When attack started he was in the plotting room. He was cutting in the circuits on his AA directors and he was going to go up to run some tests on them because of upcoming inspection. PA system was keyed open but nothing happened for a while. Could only hear the hiss of the open system. After delay, voice said, "All hands man your battle station." He went around into the next compartment, central station electrical department, there was an electrician there whom he knew. When he got in he heard, "Real planes, real bombs, no shit!" on the PA. Asked him what the hell was going on. Sounded like there was some drunk on the PA. The two of them talked for a second and then heard the general alarm gong. Torpedoes had not hit yet. He didn't have a shirt on. Couldn't go topside. Fire Control shop was up forward on the port side. He went there to his locker to get a shirt. Had to go to starboard to go up. Before he reached a ladder going up to next deck the first torpedo hit. Hits in rapid succession after that. Battle station was forward AA director. Located amidships above the bridge. On tripod mast above the conn tower said Paul. Two directors, either one could control either side. Top speed that they could input into there computer was less than the speed of most aircraft. Directors had almost a 360 clear view with the exceptions of mast. Forward AA director couldn't look directly aft and Aft AA director couldn't look directly forward.

He was kind of trapped. There was a directive that said that all unengaged personnel should go below the splinter deck. Did not come over PA, it was SOP. Someone closed the hatch above him. Probably two dozen guys. Ship was listing. Lights went out. A lot of oil came into the space. Doesn't know from where. He recalls that there was an ammunition conveyor belt right behind him. Maybe an access way. Didn't know if the space had a name. Was above and to the starboard side from the plotting room. Ship continued to roll. Could hear the water coming in. Was pretty loud, "a torrent." You couldn't stand on the deck any more because it was slippery with oil, and sharply tilted. Somebody had a flashlight. Some light. A couple guys slid down against the lower bulkhead, one of them screaming for momma, induced a little panic in the rest of them. Someone finally got the hatch opened from the underside. He was involved in the hatch opening. He was still holding on to the conveyor belt to keep from sliding away. When hatch opened everybody rushed for the ladder at once. One of the top pins of the ladder broke. Ladder swung around, lot of guys fell off, finally clambered up out of there. Ladders only attached at the top. Got up on the main deck. Looked aft towards place where main deck opened up to weather deck. Saw a big conglomeration of men that wasn't moving. Didn't join them. Had just been in a big gang and didn't want to do it again. Decided to try and get out a porthole. Said, "let's try a porthole." Climbed up over lockers and bunks, a bunch of stuff in a big jumble. Got up to the

porthole on the starboard side and squeezed through it. Seven of them went out the porthole. Recalls going to the high side, which would have been the starboard side. Ship was about on beam ends. Walked across the bottom of the ship and went into the water. Yelled at guys on the Maryland to throw them a line. Some of the mooring lines that tied the ships together were hanging into the water because they had parted when the Okie rolled. A dozen guys holding on to each one of them. He was a good swimmer, could have swum to Ford Island. Chose to stay with other guys. Someone did throw some more lines over. Was not a heaving line with a monkey fist. Was just some manila rope. Didn't remember the size. They never did put a net or ladder down the side. While he was in the water he remembers a couple of planes coming by and strafing but doesn't recall anybody getting hit. Recalls a lot of bullet splashes. Arizona had blown up. Oil from Arizona was burning and flowing down towards them. Had not reached area by Oklahoma. Paul added that it never reached the area aft of the Oklahoma. Thought there was about 20-30 yards of separation between Okie and Maryland. Guys having problems staying afloat until they could grab something. Everybody knew how to swim a little because they had to in boot camp. Remembers dozens of sailors in the water, not hundreds. While he was in the water he saw the fireball from the Shaw explosion. Went aboard the Maryland. Worked on a 5"/25 gun. Got in an ammo handling detail. Later went to Ford Island then to ammo depot at West Loch. Was there for ten days. Went down to clean up dry dock by Cassins and Downes. Recalls a bomb hitting aft on the Maryland.

Paul layed on boat deck of Maryland and threw up all of his bunker oil.

Whenever George smelled bunker fuel for the next six months the hair would raise up on his neck. Recalls the strong smell of oil. He was splattered with oil. He didn't swallow any though.

Paul recalled that the water was completely covered with oil. George said where he was it was spotty not solid. Paul went off amidships. Saw pools. He didn't get covered with it. He was well splattered with it.

George said there was an officer at the door leading aft to the weather deck from the main deck, wouldn't let anybody out. After the ship was completely turned over and had come to rest, this guy and another guy were stuck on the main deck beneath the boat deck. Took turns diving down, found a dog wrench and got out through a porthole. Paul said that Irving Davenport was the name of the officer that wouldn't let them out. Paul said he was the OOD and was wearing a .45. He told them if they stepped out he would shoot the.

Splinter deck was 2.5" thick. This would have been the overhead. George said they could had help from up on the main deck. Since he said there was help from the main deck, the splinter deck must then be the second deck.

He went to west loch on 12-7-41. Went over in a boat. West loch is not synonymous with Lualualei. Ward came in while he was at West Loch. Sailors were really pissed because no one had listened to their warning. They loaded new depth charges aboard. Paul thinks Lualualei and west loch are synonymous. Doesn't recall seeing Kenworthy at all while at West Loch. Paul said Al Hottel was in charge of work detail at west loch, gave his detail a 10-minute break. Kenworthy came and said guy would be shot at sunrise.

George remembers one night while they were at west loch they had to go out and fight a fire in the sugarcane fields. He was issued a machete and chomped sugarcane. Fire control picks up the target, enters the data into a mechanical computer, how much of a lead, how much to elevate. He had a range finder. Course and speed to the target was an estimate that he made. As soon as you started tracking you could find out if you were off. You could then reenter data. You adjusted a dial to enter data. Main battery director was just below the AA director. There was a switch at each gun where they could switch from one director to the other. George recalled a Lt. Esch. Good officer. Always an officer in the director. People in director were: pointer, trainer, range keeper operator, officer. Director was about 8' x 8'. Mostly full of equipment. Guys just fit in wherever. After about ten days the Louisville came into port and he went aboard her. Louisville was in the Far East during the attack. Java Sea he believes.